

REMARKS


Applicant respectfully requests favorable reconsideration of this application, as amended.

Claims 1, 3, 7, 10, 13, 14, and 15 have been amended, and new Claims 16-17 have been added. Accordingly, Claims 1-17 are pending.

Applicant has amended the claims to more clearly define the invention intended to be claimed. More particularly, independent Claim 1 has been amended to recite that the claimed steering column assembly includes a steering column mounting bracket having, at its forward end, a deformable component that supports a subassembly of the steering column and that can collapse in the event of a vehicle crash. New independent Claim 16 has been added to recite the structure of the collapsible steering column assembly in more detail. New independent Claim 17 has been added to recite that the collapse of the deformable component absorbs the impact of a primary collision. Claim 13 has been rewritten in independent form to include all limitations of the original claims from which it depended.

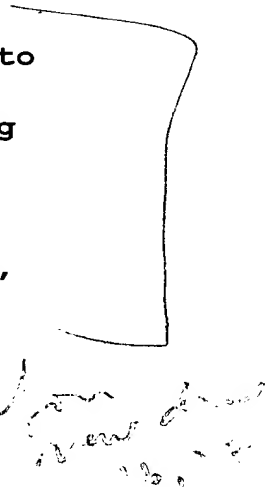
Applicant wishes to thank the Examiner for the indication of allowable matter in Claims 13 and 14.

Independent Claim 1 and Claims 2-6, 8, 9, 11, and 12 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by Tomaru et al. (Tomaru) (U.S. Patent 5,547,221). However, Tomaru does not disclose a deformable component that supports a lower subassembly of a steering column as recited in amended Claim 1. On the contrary, the Tomaru reference discloses a support bracket for the upper end of a steering column. In view of this difference in structure, a rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) is inappropriate, and the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw it.

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Moreover, with respect to Claims 16 and 17, note that Tomaru's support bracket functions to absorb impact energy due to a secondary collision in a crash, i.e., the collision of the driver with the steering column (column 7, lines 57-63). For this purpose it is designed to move forward in such a crash with the energy being gradually absorbed by a pair of deformable belt portions.

Thus, Tomaru's steering column support is designed to mitigate the effects of a secondary collision by allowing the upper end of the steering column to move forward. Applicant's invention, while not excluding a collapsible, energy-absorbing upper subassembly in a steering column,

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incorporates a deformable structure that supports a lower subassembly and allows it to move rearward during a primary collision and absorb some of the energy thereof.

Claims 7 and 10 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Tomaru, and Claim 15 has been rejected as being unpatentable over Tomaru in view of Shimizu et al. (Shimizu) (U.S. Patent 5,704,641). The rejections of dependent claims 7, 10, and 15 are believed to be moot in view of the removal of the basis for rejection of independent Claim 1 from which they depend. In particular, the Shimizu reference (U.S. Patent 5,704,641) cited for its disclosure of rake and/or reach adjustment in a steering column, and combined with Tomaru to reject Claim 15 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), does not disclose a deformable component that supports a lower subassembly of a steering column.

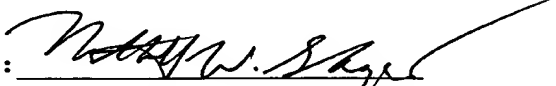
In view of the above amendments and discussion, the claims are believed to be clearly patentable over the cited references.

A check for \$84.00 is attached in payment of the required fee for excess claims.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge to Deposit Account No. 50-1165 any fees under 37 C.F.R. §§

1.16 and 1.17 that may be required by this paper and to credit any overpayment to that Account. If any extension of time is required in connection with the filing of this paper and has not been requested separately, such extension is hereby requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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